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English Learners in School

“ Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. ”

—PAULO FREIRE

In this chapter, we address the concerns of teachers when they first encounter students who are new to English in their classrooms, discussing such questions as the following:

1. Who are English learners?
2. How can I get to know my English learners when their language and culture are new to me?
3. How do cultural differences affect the way my students respond to me and to my efforts to teach them?
4. How can I ease newcomers into the routines of my class when they understand little or no English?
5. How do current policy trends affect English learners?
6. What kinds of programs exist to meet the needs of English learners?

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First, come with us into Buzz Bertolucci's classroom. It is the first day of school in Mr. Bertolucci's first-grade class. All the children are seated on the rug and have just finished the opening routines with the calendar. After introducing the children to each other through a song, Buzz places a Big Book of *The Gingerbread Man* in front of the class. With its large print and colorful illustrations, the 30-inch-tall Big Book not only captures the children's attention but also helps them understand the story's events. Mr. Bertolucci reads the book to the entire class, points to the pictures, puts on a gingerbread man mask, and acts out words such as "Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me. I'm the Gingerbread Man!" The entire book is "read" and acted out by members of the class on this, their first day of school. When the story is finished, one of the school cooks enters the room and hands a note to Mr. Bertolucci. He reads it to the class: "I jumped out of your book and ran to the cafeteria. Come and meet me! The Gingerbread Man." Teacher and children leave for the cafeteria but cannot find the Gingerbread Man there. They ask the cooks if they've seen the Gingerbread Man, but they haven't. Finally, one cook suggests that they look in the oven, and there they find another note from the Gingerbread Man: "I've gone to the janitor's store-room by the bathrooms. See you there!" The class finds the janitor and asks if he's seen the Gingerbread Man, but he replies that the Gingerbread Man has gone to the nurse's office. When they meet the nurse, the children learn that the Gingerbread Man has gone to the counselor's office and then to the principal's office. Finally, the principal reports that the Gingerbread Man has returned to their classroom. When the children return to the classroom, each one finds a Gingerbread Man cookie at his or her desk.

As the children eat their cookies, Mr. Bertolucci reads *The Gingerbread Man* again. He has introduced his children to literature in an involving way. In addition, he has introduced the new children to their school and to the many people and places in the school they will need to know. He has also presented the literature and its simple theme in a concrete and interesting manner. The children in his class will look forward to the next book he reads, and they will look forward to reading and writing themselves.

It may surprise you to learn that more than half the children in Mr. Bertolucci's class are new to the English language, coming from homes in which languages such as Spanish, Cantonese, or Japanese are spoken. Such linguistic variety was not always the case, but changes in the neighborhood over the past 10 years have been dramatic. Mr. Bertolucci has responded to these changes by keeping many of his favorite teaching routines, such as *The Gingerbread Man*, but modifying them to meet the needs of his English learners. Given today's immigration patterns, you may be facing similar changes in your school. In this book, we will show you how to develop and modify oral language, reading, and writing instruction to meet the needs of your students who are new to English. But first we want to introduce you to the great diversity among the children who are called English learners, to help you better understand and integrate them into your classroom and school. We use the term *English learners* to refer to non-native English speakers who are learning English in school. Typically, English learners speak a primary language other than English at home, such as Spanish, Cantonese, Russian, Hmong, or French. English learners vary in their proficiency in their primary languages. Of course, they vary in English language proficiency as well. Those who are beginners to intermediates in English have often been referred to as **limited English proficient (LEP)**, a term that is used in federal legislation and other official documents. However as a result of

the pejorative connotation of “limited English proficient,” most educators prefer the terms **English learners**, **English language learners**, **non-native English speakers**, and **second language learners** to refer to students who are in the process of learning English as a new language. The terms **English as a Second Language (ESL)** and **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** are often used to refer to the acquisition of English as a non-native language. We continue to use the former term because it is widely used and descriptive, even though what we refer to as a “second language” might actually be a student’s third or fourth language. A synonym for ESL that you will find in this book is **English Language Development (ELD)**.



Who Are English Language Learners?

Students who speak English as a non-native language live in all areas of the United States. The number of English learners has steadily increased in recent decades, nearly doubling between 1994 and 2004 when survey results estimated that 5,119,561 English learners were enrolled in U.S. public schools in grades preK-12. During that time, English learner enrollment increased at almost seven times the rate of total student enrollment (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006). States with the highest numbers of English learners are California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois. In recent years, however, EL populations have surged in the Midwest and South and in Nevada and Oregon. Spanish is by far the most prevalent primary language, spoken by 80% of ELs. Many English learners are sons and daughters of immigrants who have left their home countries to seek a better life. Some recent immigrants have left countries brutally torn apart by war or political strife in regions such as Southeast Asia, Central America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Others have immigrated for economic reasons. Still others come to be reunited with families who are already here or to seek educational opportunities they may find in the United States. Finally, many English learners were born in the United States, and some of them, such as American Indians of numerous tribal heritages, have roots in U.S. soil that go back for countless generations.

Whether immigrant or native born, each group brings its own history and culture to the enterprise of schooling (Heath, 1986). Furthermore, each group contributes to the rich tapestry of languages and cultures that form the basic fabric of the United States. Our first task as teachers, then, is to become aware of our students’ personal histories and cultures, so as to understand their feelings, frustrations, hopes, and aspirations. At the same time, as teachers we need to look closely at ourselves to discover how our own culturally ingrained attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and communication styles play out in our teaching and affect our students’ learning. By developing such understanding, we create the essential foundation for meaningful instruction, including reading and writing instruction. As understanding grows, teacher and students alike can come to an awareness of both diversity and universals in human experience, as shared in this poem by a high school student who emigrated with her parents from Cambodia (Mullen & Olsen, 1990).

“You and I Are the Same”

You and I are the same
but we don't let our hearts see.
Black, White and Asian
Africa, China, United States and all other
countries around the world
Peel off their skin
Like you peel an orange
See their flesh
like you see in my heart
Peel off their meat
And peel my wickedness with it too
Until there's nothing left
but bones.
Then you will see that you and I
are the same.

(Kien Po, “You and I Are the Same.” 1990. San Francisco: California Tomorrow. Reprinted with permission of the author.)



How Can I Get to Know My English Learners?

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Given the variety and mobility among second language groups, it is likely that most teachers, including specialists in bilingual education or ESL, will at some time encounter students whose language and culture they know little about. Perhaps you are already accustomed to working with students of diverse cultures, but if you are not, how can you develop an understanding of students from unfamiliar linguistic and cultural backgrounds? Far from a simple task, the process requires not only fact finding but also continual observation and interpretation of children's behavior, combined with trial and error in communication. Thus the process is one that must take place gradually.

Getting Basic Information When a New Student Arrives

When a new student arrives, we suggest three initial steps. First of all, begin to find out basic facts about the child: What country is the child from? How long has he or she lived in the United States? Where and with whom is the child living? What language or languages are spoken in the home? If the child is an immigrant, what were the circumstances of immigration? Some children have experienced traumatic events before and during immigration, and the process of adjustment to a new country may represent yet another link in a chain of stressful life events (Olsen, 1998).

Second, obtain as much information about the student's prior school experiences as possible. School records may be available if the child has already been enrolled in a U.S. school. However as you are not likely to receive a cumulative folder forwarded from another country, you may need to piece the information together yourself, a task that requires resourcefulness, imagination, and time.

Some school districts collect background information on students when they register and administer English language proficiency tests. Thus, your own district office is one possible source of information. In addition, you may need the assistance of someone who is familiar with the home language and culture, such as another teacher, a paraprofessional, or a community liaison, who can ask questions of parents, students, or siblings. Keep in mind that some children may have had no previous schooling, despite their age, or perhaps their schooling has been interrupted. Other students may have attended school in their home countries. Students with prior educational experience bring various kinds of knowledge to school subjects and may be quite advanced. Be prepared to validate your students for their special knowledge. We saw how important this was for fourth-grader Li Fen, a recent immigrant from mainland China who found herself in a regular English language classroom, not knowing a word of English. Li Fen was a bright child but naturally somewhat reticent to involve herself in classroom activities during her first month in the class. She made a real turnaround, however, the day the class was studying long division. Li Fen accurately solved three problems at the chalkboard in no time at all, though her procedure differed slightly from the one in the math book. Her classmates were duly impressed with her mathematical competence and did not hide their admiration. Her teacher, of course, gave her a smile with words of congratulations. From that day forward, Li Fen participated more readily, having earned a place in the class.

When you are gathering information on your students' prior schooling, it's important to find out whether they are literate in their home language. If they are, you might encourage them to keep a journal using their native language, and if possible, you should acquire native language books, magazines, or newspapers to have on hand for the new student. In this way, you validate the student's language, culture, and academic competence, while providing a natural bridge to English reading. *Make these choices with sensitivity, though, building on positive responses from your students.* Bear in mind, for example, that some newcomers may not wish to be identified as different from their classmates. We make this caveat because of our experience with a 7-year-old boy, recently arrived from Mexico, who attended a school where everyone spoke English only. When we spoke to him in Spanish, he did not respond, giving the impression that he did not know the language. When we visited his home and spoke Spanish with his parents, he was not pleased. At that point in his life, he may have wanted nothing more than to blend into the dominant social environment, in this case an affluent, European American neighborhood saturated with English.

The discomfort felt by this young boy is an important reminder of the internal conflict experienced by many youngsters as they come to terms with life in a new culture. As they learn English and begin to fit into school routines, they embark on a personal journey toward a new cultural identity. If they come to reject their home language and culture, moving toward maximum assimilation into the dominant culture, they may experience alienation from their parents and family. A moving personal account of such a journey is provided by journalist Richard Rodriguez in his book *Hunger for Memory* (1982). Another revealing account is the lively, humorous, and at times, brutally painful memoir, *Burro Genius*, by novelist Victor Villaseñor (2004). Villaseñor creates a vivid portrayal

of a young boy seeking to form a positive identity as he struggles in school with dyslexia and negative stereotyping of his Mexican language and culture. Even if English learners strive to adopt the ways of the new culture without replacing those of the home, they will have departed significantly from many traditions their parents hold dear. Thus for many students the generation gap necessarily widens to the extent that the values, beliefs, roles, responsibilities, and general expectations differ between the home culture and the dominant one. Keeping this in mind may help you empathize with students' personal conflicts of identity and personal life choices.

The third suggestion, then, is to become aware of basic features of the home culture, such as religious beliefs and customs, food preferences and restrictions, and roles and responsibilities of children and adults (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003; Saville-Troike, 1978). These basic bits of information, though sketchy, will guide your initial interactions with your new students and may help you avoid asking them to say or do things that may be prohibited or frowned on in the home culture, including such common activities as celebrating birthdays, pledging allegiance to the flag, and eating hot dogs. Finding out basic information also provides a starting point from which to interpret your newcomer's responses to you, to your other students, and to the ways you organize classroom activities. Just as you make adjustments, your students will also begin to make adjustments as they grow in the awareness and acceptance that ways of acting, dressing, eating, talking, and behaving in school are different to a greater or lesser degree from what they may have experienced before.

Classroom Activities that Let You Get to Know Your Students

Several fine learning activities may also provide some of the personal information you need to help you know your students better. One way is to have all your students write an illustrated autobiography, "All About Me" or "The Story of My Life." Each book may be bound individually, or all the life stories may be bound together and published in a class book, complete with illustrations or photographs. Alternatively, student stories may be posted on the bulletin board for all to read. This assignment lets you in on the lives of all your students and permits them to get to know, appreciate, and understand each other as well. Of particular importance, this activity does not single out your newcomers because all your students will be involved.

Personal writing assignments like the one mentioned lend themselves to many grade levels because personal topics remain pertinent across age groups even into adulthood. Students who speak little or no English may begin by illustrating a series of important events in their lives, perhaps to be captioned with your assistance or that of another student. In addition, there are many ways to accommodate students' varying English writing abilities. For example, if students write more easily in their native tongue than in English, allow them to do so. If needed, ask a bilingual student or paraprofessional to translate the meaning for you. Be sure to publish the student's story as written in the native language because you will thereby both validate the home language and expose the rest of the class to a different language and its writing system. If a student knows some

English but is not yet able to write, allow her or him to dictate the story to you or to another student in the class.

Another way to begin to know your students is to start a dialogue journal with them. Provide each student with a blank journal and allow the student to draw or write in the language of the student's choice. You may then respond to the students' journal entries on a periodic basis. Interactive dialogue journals, described in detail in Chapter 5, have proven useful for English learners of all ages (Kreeft, 1984). Dialogue journals make an excellent introduction to literacy and facilitate the development of an ongoing personal relationship between the student and you, the teacher. As with personal writing, this activity is appropriate for all students, and if you institute it with the entire class you provide a way for newcomers to participate in a "regular" class activity. Being able to do what others do can be a source of great pride and self-satisfaction to students who are new to the language and culture of the school.

Finally, many teachers start the school year with a unit on themes such as "Where We Were Born" or "Family Origins." Again, this activity is relevant to all students, whether immigrant or native born, and it gives teacher and students alike a chance to know more about themselves and each other. A typical activity with this theme is the creation of a world map with a string connecting each child's name and birthplace to your city and school. Don't forget to put your name on the list along with your birthplace. From there, you and your students may go on to study more about the various regions and countries of origin. Clearly, this type of theme leads in many directions, including the discovery of people in the community who may be able to share information about their home countries with your class. Your guests may begin by sharing food, holiday customs, art, or music with students. Through such contact, theme studies, life stories, and reading about cultures in books such as those listed in Example 1.1 you may begin to become aware of some of the more subtle aspects of the culture, such as how the culture communicates politeness and respect or how the culture views the role of children, adults, and the school. If you are lucky enough to find such community resources, you will not only enliven

EXAMPLE 1.1 • A FEW IMPORTANT BOOKS ON MULTICULTURAL TEACHING

- Banks, J. A. (2003). *Teaching strategies for ethnic studies* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Darder, A. (1991). *Culture and power in the classroom: A critical foundation for bicultural education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Garcia, E. (2001). *Understanding and meeting the challenge of student cultural diversity*. (3rd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Igoa, C. (1995). *The inner world of the immigrant child*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Nieto, S. & Bode, P. (2007). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Tiedt, P. L., & Tiedt, I. M. (2006). *Multicultural teaching: A handbook of activities, information, and resources*. (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
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your teaching but also broaden your cross-cultural understanding (Ada & Zubizarreta, 2001).

Not all necessary background information will emerge from these classroom activities. You will no doubt want to look into cultural, historical, and geographical resources available at your school or community library. In addition, you may find resource personnel at your school, including paraprofessionals and resource teachers, who can help with specific questions or concerns. In the final analysis, though, your primary source of information is the students themselves as you interrelate on a day-to-day basis.

How Do Cultural Differences Affect Teaching and Learning?

The enterprise of teaching and learning is deeply influenced by culture in a variety of ways. To begin with, schools themselves reflect the values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the larger society. In fact schools represent a major socializing force for all students. For English learners, moreover, school is often the *primary* source of adaptation to the language and culture of the larger society. It is here that students may begin to integrate aspects of the new culture as their own, while retaining, rejecting, or modifying traditions from home.

Teachers and students bring to the classroom particular cultural orientations that affect how they perceive and interact with each other in the classroom. As teachers of English learners, most of us will encounter students whose languages and cultures differ from our own. Thus we need to learn about our students and their cultures while at the same time reflecting on *our own* culturally rooted behaviors that may facilitate or interfere with teaching and learning (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000). In this section we define basic aspects of culture in the classroom as a starting point for looking at ourselves and our students in this light.

Definitions of Culture

Culture may be defined as the shared beliefs, values, and rule-governed patterns of behavior, including language, that define a group and are required for group membership (Goodenough, 1981; Saville-Troike, 1978). Thus defined, culture comprises three essential aspects: what people know and believe, what people do, and what people make and use. Culture thus serves to ensure group cohesion and survival. Every child is born into the culture of a particular group of people, and through the culture's child-rearing practices every child is socialized, to a greater or lesser extent, toward becoming first a "good boy" or "good girl" and ultimately a "good man" or "good woman" in the eyes of the culture. Thus, culture may be thought of as the acquired knowledge people use both to interpret experience and generate behavior (Spradley, 1980).

It is important to note that cultures are neither monolithic nor static. Rather they include many layers and variations related to age, gender, social status, occupation, wealth, and power. Cultural changes occur as people encounter or

develop new ideas and ways of being. Technology offers a handy example of cultural change if you consider the impact of cell phones on how people stay in contact. Contrast how people today keep up with each other in the United States, for example, compared to the days of the Pony Express just 150 years ago! Bearing in mind the complexity of culture, we offer some ways to consider its effects on classroom interactions, including developing your skill as an effective participant–observer.

Becoming an Effective Participant–Observer in Your Own Classroom

When you make observations in your classroom, you are actually using some of the tools used by anthropologists when they study another culture through *ethnography* (e.g., introspection, interviewing, observation, and participant observation). As the teacher, you are automatically both **participant** and **observer** in the classroom culture. To learn about yourself and your students through personal interactions, you may need to hone your skills in observing and interpreting behaviors, including your own behavior. Observation skills are especially important when you first meet your students, whether at the beginning of the school year or when they first enroll in your class. One procedure to help focus your observations is to keep a journal in which you jot notes at the end of each day concerning your interactions with students and their responses to you. Does she seem comfortable seeking help from you? Is he starting to form friendships? In which activities does your new student appear most comfortable: small-group activities, individual seatwork, listening to stories, drawing pictures? In which activities is the student reluctant? By noticing activities that are most comfortable for students, you can make sure that your newcomer has frequent opportunities to participate in them. In this way, you build a positive attitude toward what may as yet be an alien environment: school. From there, you may gradually draw the student into other school routines.

To make the most of your introspective reflections and observations, you may need some concepts to guide interpretations. In other words, it's one thing to notice that Nazrene “tunes out” during whole-class lessons but quite another to figure out why, so that you can alter your instruction to reach her. To provide you with some interpretive touchstones, we suggest you consider for a moment some aspects that constitute culture because these represent potential sources of overt conflict or silent suffering if your classroom rules and structures conflict with those already culturally ingrained in your students.

For a start at describing aspects of culture, we summarize in Table 1.1 “cultural content” with questions outlined by Saville-Troike (1978) categorized into various components, including (1) family structure; (2) definitions of stages, periods, or transitions during a person's life; (3) roles of children and adults and corresponding behavior in terms of power and politeness; (4) discipline; (5) time and space; (6) religion; (7) food; (8) health and hygiene; and (9) history, traditions, holidays, and celebrations. Table 1.1 provides a number of questions that you might ask yourself about these aspects of culture. As you read the questions, try to answer them for your own culture and for a different cultural group to get a sense of similarities and differences across cultures. Do you find potential points of conflict in the classroom context? How might you deal with them?

TABLE 1.1 • CULTURAL CONTENT AND QUESTIONS

CULTURAL CONTENT	QUESTIONS
Family structures	What constitutes a family? Who among these or others live in one house? What are the rights and responsibilities of each family member? What is the hierarchy of authority? What is the relative importance of the individual family member in contrast to the family as a whole?
Life cycles	What are the criteria for defining stages, periods, or transitions in life? What rites of passage are there? What behaviors are considered appropriate for children of different ages? How might these conflict with behaviors taught or encouraged in school? How is the age of the children computed? What commemoration, if any, is made of the child's birth and when?
Roles and interpersonal relationships	What roles are available to whom, and how are they acquired? Is education relevant to learning these roles? How do the roles of girls and women differ from those of boys and men? How do people greet each other? What forms of address are used between people of differing roles? Do girls work and interact with boys? Is it proper? How is deference shown and to whom and by whom?
Discipline	What is discipline? What counts as discipline and what doesn't? Which behaviors are considered socially acceptable for boys versus girls at different ages? Who or what is considered responsible if a child misbehaves? The child? Parents? Older siblings? The environment? Is blame even ascribed? Who has authority over whom? To what extent can one person impose his or her will on another? How is behavior traditionally controlled? To what extent and in what domains?
Time and space	How important is punctuality? How important is speed in completing a task? Are there restrictions associated with certain seasons? What is the spatial organization of the home? How much space are people accustomed to? What significance is associated with different locations or directions, including north, south, east, and west?
Religion	What restrictions are there concerning topics discussed in school? Are dietary restrictions to be observed, including fasting on particular occasions? When are these occasions? What restrictions are associated with death and the dead?
Food	What is eaten? In what order and how often is food eaten? Which foods are restricted? Which foods are typical? What social obligations are there with regard to food giving, reciprocity, and honoring people? What restrictions or proscriptions are associated with handling, offering, or discarding food?
Health and hygiene	How are illnesses treated and by whom? What is considered to be the cause? If a student were involved in an accident at school, would any of the common first aid practices be considered unacceptable?
History, traditions, and holidays	Which events and people are sources of pride for the group? To what extent does the group in the United States identify with the history and traditions of the country of origin? What holidays and celebrations are considered appropriate for observing in school? Which ones are appropriate only for private observance?

When students in our university classes discuss the questions in Table 1.1 according to their own family traditions, interesting patterns emerge. Although many students identify with middle-class, European American cultural values, such as punctuality, some also add special traditions passed down from immigrant grandparents or great grandparents, including special foods and holiday traditions. Other students come from families who have been in this country for centuries, yet maintain particular regional traditions such as herbal healing practices. In addition, some students have maintained strong religious traditions, such as Buddhist, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Hindu, Judaic, Muslim, and traditional American Indian beliefs. From these discussions, we find that each individual actually embodies a variety of cultures and subcultures.

One student found the cultural questions an interesting way to look at her own family. Her parents had met and married in Germany, her father an Egyptian and Coptic Christian, her mother a German Catholic. From there they moved with their three young children to the United States. Najia reflected, with some amusement, on how different her German relatives were from her Egyptian relatives. For example, her German relatives visited once or twice a year, making plans well in advance and staying a short, predetermined amount of time. Her Egyptian relatives, in contrast, “couldn’t seem to get enough of each other.” They loved long visits, with as many of the family together as possible. Najia’s German mother emphasized orderliness and punctuality in the home, with carefully scheduled and planned meals. The family ate at the specified hour, and all were expected to be there on time. With such differences concerning time and space, Najia wondered that her parents were able to make a highly successful marriage. She attributed their success in part to their individual personalities: her mother, an artist, is by nature easygoing and flexible; her father, an electronic engineer, is an organized thinker and planner. As individuals, they seemed compatible with many of each other’s cultural ways. Najia’s reflections are a reminder that people’s behavior combines both cultural and individual differences.

Sociolinguistic Interactions in the Classroom

One particularly important aspect of culture that can affect teaching and learning has to do with the ways you use language during instruction. Because teaching and learning depend on clear communication between teacher and students, the communicative success of teacher–student interactions is crucial. Early on, difficulties may arise from lack of a common language. However, communication difficulties may persist even after students have acquired the basics of English if the student and teacher are following different sociocultural rules for speaking (Cazden, 1986). For example, if the home culture values strict authority of adults over children and if children are only supposed to speak when spoken to, then these same children may be reluctant to volunteer an answer in class. You might quite logically interpret this reluctance as disinterest or lack of knowledge, when in fact the student may simply be waiting for you to invite him or her to respond. On the other hand, some students may not want to answer your questions because displaying knowledge in class amounts to showing off, causing them to stand out, uncomfortably spotlighted at center stage (Philips, 1983). Some students consider enthusiastic knowledge display impolite because it might make their friends appear ignorant. These examples illustrate how cultural values affecting language use may impede teacher–student communication in either English or the home language.

Language use differences can be especially confusing in the realm of teacher questioning. Research has shown that teachers often do not allow much *wait time* after asking a question in class (Rowe, 1974). It turns out that what is considered enough wait time in everyday conversations varies across cultures, as do rules concerning how and when to interrupt and the number of people who may speak at once (Bauman & Scherzer, 1974; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Eisenberg, 1984; Shultz, Erickson, & Florio, 1982). In addition, students must learn classroom rules regarding who can speak with whom and when (Mehan, 1979). These rules may vary with the activity structure (e.g., teacher-led lesson versus small-group projects) and from one teacher to the next. Thus, it is important to make *your* rules explicit for speaking in class and to allow sufficient wait time for students to respond. Helping students find their comfort zone for expressing themselves appropriately in class will pay off in learning, self-esteem, and social relationships.

Another potential problem area is the known-answer question (i.e., questions used to assess student knowledge for which the teacher already knows the answer). For some students, these known-answer questions might be considered odd or of dubious purpose (Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979), resulting in student reluctance to participate in such interrogations. You might want to reflect on your own questioning practices in terms of wait time, question types, and the actual phrasing you use. If your questions are greeted with blank stares, try altering your questioning style, or perhaps reserve discussion questions for small-group activities. Another possibility is to introduce question and answer sessions with a brief explanation of what you are trying to accomplish and why. That way, if students are unaccustomed to your question types, you will at least help them understand your purpose for asking them.

Culturally Related Responses to Classroom Organization

There are other cultural differences that may interfere with student participation in learning activities in the classroom. One of these is the social organization of lessons (Mehan, 1979). Within the constraints of time and adult assistance,



INTERNET RESOURCES

The California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) site is a good place to begin your exploration of issues relating to English language learners (www.catesol.org/index.html). For example, the CATESOL news link contains articles and reports on recent events (e.g., James Cummins' views on No Child Left Behind and ELL students). Another link contains official position papers on important topics such as the Role of English as a Second Language in Public Schools Grades K-12, Language Policy, and

Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners. You might also want to visit the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) Website at www.ncela.gwu.edu to explore the extensive resources, online library, databases, frequently asked questions, classroom ideas, and more, all aimed at improving teaching and learning for ELLs. The site will also link you to current K-12 education policy briefs. You might want to choose one of the frequently asked questions to answer and discuss with your classmates.

teachers typically use whole-class, small-group, and individualized formats for instruction. It is important to recognize that these formats represent distinctly different types of **participation structures** (Philips, 1983), each with its own rules about when to speak and how. Students may experience various degrees of comfort or discomfort with these various formats based on both cultural and individual differences (Au & Jordan, 1981). For example, the use of small groups for cooperative learning is intended to increase learning for all students but especially for ethnic minority students (Kagan, 1986). The rationale is that many ethnic minority cultures instill strong values of group cooperation and that such instruction will therefore build on familiar cultural experiences. In addition, cooperative groups provide students with practice in getting along with people different from themselves to the extent that groups consist of students with different backgrounds. We are convinced that cooperative group learning is a valuable tool for teachers for the reasons described. However, it is important to keep in mind that some students may feel that the teacher, as the academic authority, is the only proper person to learn from in the classroom. One way to accommodate such students is to balance your use of group work with necessary teacher-directed instruction. When you do ask students to work in cooperative groups, you need to explain your reasons for doing so, thereby showing that group learning is valid academically. In fact, parents may need to hear your reasons as well. We knew one child who was functioning beautifully in cooperative groups, yet during parent conferences, his father politely asked when we were going to start teaching! Cultural differences in teaching practices thus present challenges to teachers, students, and parents alike.

In summary, we know that different students may be more comfortable with some instructional formats than with others and that their feelings stem from both cultural and individual preferences. We suggest you *use a variety of formats to meet the multiple needs of your diverse students*. Your best route is to be aware of how you create the participation structures of learning (i.e., grouping formats) to observe and interpret student responses with thoughtful sensitivity, making modifications as needed. In so doing, you **differentiate instruction** (Tomlinson, 1999) according to particular student needs, a topic we discuss in Chapter 3 and apply in subsequent chapters.

Literacy Traditions from Home and Community

As you approach the teaching of reading and writing to English learners, you will want to be aware of the literacy knowledge your students bring with them. Literacy knowledge stems not only from prior schooling but also from experiences with the ways reading and writing are used in the home and community (Au & Jordan, 1981; Boggs, 1972; Heath, 1983). It is helpful to become aware of how reading and writing are traditionally used in the community because these traditional literacy uses will influence your students' ideas, beliefs, and assumptions about reading and writing. You will want to build on these ideas and make sure to expand them to include the functions of literacy required by U.S. schools and society. Let us make this concept more clear through some examples.

Gustavo, age 7, entered the first grade of an urban elementary school in February, halfway through the academic year. He had come from rural Mexico, and this was his first time in school. He didn't even know how to hold a pencil.

At first, he was so intimidated that he would refuse to come into the classroom at the beginning of the school day. With persistent coaxing from the teacher and her assistant, he reluctantly complied. Once in, Gustavo was anxious to fit into the normal class routines. He loved to wave his hand in the air when the teacher asked a question, although at first he didn't know what to do when called on. That part of the routine took a little time to master.

One day, as we were chatting with Gustavo, he began to tell us all about his little town in Michoacán, about the travails of the trip *pa' 'l norte* (to the north), and then about an incident when his 2-year-old sister became critically ill. His mother, he recounted, knew what medicine the baby needed, but it was only available in Mexico. So they had to find someone who could write to send to Mexico for the medicine. They did, and Gustavo's baby sister recovered.

What does this story tell us about the concept of literacy that Gustavo offers for the teacher to build on? First, we can surmise that Gustavo has not had extensive opportunities to explore reading and writing at home. He probably has not been read to much nor has he been provided with paper and pencils for dabbling in drawing and writing—the very activities so highly recommended today as the foundation of literacy development. On the other hand, he is well aware of how important it is to be able to write—it was a matter of life and death for his sister! Furthermore, he is aware of the inconveniences, not to say dangers, of illiteracy. Thus, Gustavo, at the tender age of 7, brings a deeper understanding of the importance of literacy than many children whose rich early literacy experiences allow them to take such things for granted. Gustavo's motivation and understanding provide the foundation for the teacher to build on. Gustavo needs daily exposure to the pleasures and practical functions of print through stories, poems, rhymes, labels, letters, notes, recipes, board games, instructions, and more. With practice and hard work, his proudest moment will come when he himself writes the next letter to Mexico.

In contrast to Gustavo, students who are older when they immigrate often bring substantial experience and skill in reading and writing in their home language. These experiences and skills provide a good foundation for learning to read and write in English. Students who read in their home language already know that print bears a systematic relationship to spoken language, that print carries meaning, and that reading and writing can be used for many purposes. Moreover, literate students know that they are capable of making sense of written language. Such experience and knowledge will transfer directly to learning to read and write in English, given English language development and appropriate literacy instruction (Cummins, 1981; Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Hudelson, 1987; Odlin, 1989). Thus, when students arrive with home language literacy skills, teachers do not have to start all over again to teach reading and writing (Goodman, Goodman, & Flores, 1979; Peregoy, 1989; Peregoy & Boyle, 1991, 2000). Rather, they can build on an existing base of literacy knowledge, adding the specifics for English as needed, a topic developed fully in subsequent chapters.

In addition to literacy knowledge, newcomers with substantial prior education often bring academic knowledge in areas such as mathematics, science, history, and geography. It is important to find out about such expertise to recognize it, honor it, and build on it. You might also seek ways for your students to share their particular knowledge with the rest of the class. To conclude our discussion of culture, we suggest you take another look at your own cultural ways again to focus on how your attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions might play out in your classroom.

Who Am I in the Lives of My Students?

Working effectively with students from diverse cultures presents challenges and opportunities. As the teacher, you are in a position to inspire your students and open their eyes to the future in ways that no one else can. As you think back on your own schooling, you probably recall teachers who made a difference in your life. Because teachers have such great impact on their students, it's important to acquire the habit of self-reflection with regard to our own teaching practices and interpersonal relationships with students. For example, one deeply committed high school teacher we know undertook an action research project in which she tape-recorded her writing conferences with individual students. Upon transcribing her data, she discovered that she ended her conferences with White students by saying she looked forward to the next conference, but with her Black students she merely bid them good-bye. She was shocked by this distinct difference in treatment and upset to the point of tears, especially so because one of her stated curriculum goals was to empower *all* her students through writing. Through the process, however, this teacher was able to change her conference style to treat all students equitably with the same encouragement. At the same time, she gained a powerful insight into how easily a teacher can unintentionally disempower, rather than empower, students, perpetuating inequalities inherent in the dominant society rather than transcending and transforming them for the better. Through her critical self-examination process, this fine teacher had attained a new level of **ideological clarity** (Bartolomé, 2000; Cadiero-Kaplan, 2007). Teaching, like parenting, allows significant opportunities for a deeper understanding of ourselves and our influence on the lives of others.

How Can I Ease Newcomers into the Routines of My Classroom When They Know Little or No English?

As you begin to know more about your students, you will be better able to offer them social and emotional support. Only when new students become comfortably integrated into your classroom's social and academic routines will optimal second language acquisition and academic learning occur. Thus you'll need to give special effort and attention to those who are newcomers to the country. Adapting from Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1968), we discuss basic strategies for integrating new children into your classroom. Two basic needs you will want to consider are (1) safety and security and (2) a sense of belonging. By paying close attention to these basic needs, you lay the foundation for meeting your students' self-esteem needs and for their growth in language and academic abilities.

First Things First: Safety and Security

When English language learners first arrive in school, a "first things first" approach is helpful, following Maslow's views. Thus the first concern must be with creating a feeling of safety and security. To address this need, there are several

things you can do. First, it is helpful to assign a personal buddy to each newcomer, and if possible, one who speaks the newcomer's home language. The buddy must be a classmate who already knows the school and is comfortable there. The buddy's job is to accompany the newcomer throughout the day's routines to make sure he or she knows where to find such essentials as the bathroom, the cafeteria, and the bus stop. The newcomer needs to learn not only where things are but also the various rules for using them. For example, each school has its own rules about how to line up and collect lunch at the cafeteria, where to sit, how to behave, and when to leave. Furthermore, there are culturally specific rules about how to eat particular kinds of food; rules that we take for granted but that may be totally foreign to a new arrival. Perhaps you yourself recall feeling tentative and intimidated the first time you ate in the school cafeteria. If so, you will have some idea of the anxiety that can accompany the first days of school for a youngster who is new not only to the school, but also to the entire culture it represents. The personal buddy helps the new student through these initial days, helping alleviate anxieties and embarrassments that are bound to occur.

Another way to address the safety and security needs of newcomers is to follow predictable routines in your daily classroom schedule. Most teachers follow a fairly stable schedule within which instructional content varies. Predictability in routine creates a sense of security for all students, but it is especially important for students who are new to the language and culture of the school. In fact, your predictable routines may be the first stable feature some students have experienced in a long time, especially if they have recently immigrated under adverse circumstances.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

An additional way to promote security and create a sense of belonging is to assign your student to a home group that remains unchanged for a long time. In classrooms in which student seating is arranged at tables, the home group may be defined by table. The purpose of the home group is to develop minicommunities of interdependence, support, and identity. If such groups are an ongoing aspect of classroom social organization, with rules of caring, respect, and concern already in place, then the home group provides an ideal social unit to receive a newcomer.

Regardless of how you organize your classroom, it is always important to seat new students toward the middle or front of the classroom, in a place where you can observe them closely and where they can observe the classroom interactions of other, more experienced students. We don't recommend placing new students at the back or other far reaches of the room. In our experience, students who speak little or no English tend to be placed at the periphery of the classroom where they sometimes blend into the woodwork and are forgotten. Even if you feel a child can't understand a word you are saying, you can integrate the child into the class by simply looking his or her way while speaking. We encourage conscious integration of newcomers into the social fabric of the classroom so as to avoid unconscious marginalization.

By paying close attention to the social and emotional needs of your new students, you will be laying the foundation for the early stages of language



When students share information about their home countries, they grow in self-esteem while broadening the horizons of their peers.

acquisition. For example, the one-on-one attention of the personal buddy offers numerous opportunities for your newcomer to learn many basic English words and phrases at the survival level. In addition, repetition of classroom routines provides non-English speakers with ideal language learning opportunities because the words and phrases that accompany such routines are constantly repeated within a meaningful, concrete context. If you count up the number of times a child hears such functional phrases as “It’s lunch time now” and “The quiet table may line up first,” you will get an idea of how valuable such **context-embedded** (Cummins, 1980) language can be for rapid learning of basic English expressions. Finally, integrating newcomers into cooperative groups provides further social and academic language learning opportunities, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Thus by attending to the security needs of your limited English proficient students, you also lay a firm foundation for English language acquisition.

As English language acquisition progresses and students begin to become a part of the social fabric of your class, they are well positioned to grow in self-esteem through successful participation in both the social and academic aspects of classroom life. Thus Maslow’s theory provides a useful way to look at the initial needs of newcomers. As the social-emotional foundation is laid, all the other aspects of personal growth may begin to interweave and support each other, with social and academic competence creating self-esteem and reinforcing feelings of security and belonging. In the process, English language development will be further enhanced.



Current Policy Trends Affecting the Education of English Learners

Whether you are new or experienced in the field of education, media reports have no doubt introduced you to various reform efforts in education; many of which have been promoted by federal and state education policy. Because disparate needs and interests are served by education policy and because there are always divergent points of view as to how any problem may be solved, the arena of educational policy is filled with controversy and debate. In this section, we briefly discuss education policies affecting English learners across the nation and offer additional resources on this complex topic.

Academic Standards and Assessment

The implementation of academic standards and assessment permeates all levels of education today. If you are in a teaching credential program, for example, chances are your coursework is organized to teach and assess what you should know and be able to do to be an effective teacher. Similarly, standards have been delineated for K–12 students that specifically define the knowledge and skills that students must attain for promotion and graduation in subjects such as reading, math, science, social science, and English language arts. In addition, standards have been developed that specifically address English language development for students new to English (e.g., Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL], 2006; California State Department of Education, 2002). Teachers generally need to become familiar with the standards of the content areas they teach and with standards specific to English learners. In this section, we introduce you to basic issues in standards-based reforms. In Chapter 3, we discuss how teachers implement standards-based instruction in their classrooms.

The standards and assessment movement traces its origins to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a national report funded by the U.S. Congress that called for improvement in education across the country. Among the outcomes of the report was the development of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a large-scale, national assessment program that permits comparisons among states on student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. By conducting periodic assessments of students in grades 4, 8, and 12, NAEP is able to provide the public with a report card on how well students are doing across the nation. NAEP findings have been used to spur education reforms, such as the reading instruction reforms of the 1990s, aimed at increasing student achievement. The current focus on rigorous academic standards, assessment, and accountability can all be traced back to the reforms called for in *A Nation at Risk*.

In line with today's emphasis on standards and assessment, a large-scale effort to serve English language learners has been undertaken by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium (www.wida.us/) involving 15 states serving more than 420,000 English learners in grades preK–12. Among their many accomplishments, WIDA developed English language proficiency standards that served as the basis for TESOL's *PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards* (TESOL, 2006), which address social language and academic

language development in the content areas, including performance expectations for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (See Chapter 3 for more information on the TESOL standards.) The WIDA Consortium has also developed an English language proficiency test aligned with their standards and a variety of other standards and assessment tools to help teachers and administrators better serve English learners. Furthermore, WIDA has developed primary language resources, including Spanish language proficiency standards and test report forms to parents or guardians in 19 languages. The WIDA Consortium merits a visit to their website because new resources are continually added.

In recent years the push for high academic standards and achievement has gained momentum. For students to achieve high academic standards, Congress encouraged national education organizations and state departments of education to develop rather detailed descriptions of curriculum content to be taught across the grades in subjects such as reading, mathematics, social science, science, and English language arts. Standards documents are generally structured to include (1) content standards that delineate what students should know and be able to do, (2) benchmarks that specify expected knowledge and skills for each content standard at different grade levels, and (3) progress indicators that describe how well students need to do to meet a given content standard (Laternau, 2003). Criteria for achievement are thus built in to the standards.

High-Stakes Testing

Hand in glove with the use of curriculum standards is the implementation of high-stakes, standardized testing to measure how well standards are being met. Serious consequences may be applied when standards are not met, supposedly to motivate achievement and increase accountability (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000). For example, performance on a high school exit exam may determine whether a student will receive a high school diploma, regardless of passing grades in all required high school coursework. Similarly, standardized test performance may play a part in deciding grade retention or promotion of students in elementary, middle, and high school. School funding may depend on raising test scores. Furthermore, teachers and principals may be held directly accountable for student achievement (Afflerbach, 2002). Low-achieving schools, for example, may be subject to restaffing measures, in which teachers and principal are moved elsewhere and a totally new staff brought in.

The teeth in the jaws of high-stakes testing have been sharpened by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), federal legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) originally passed in 1965 to improve academic performance among lower-achieving, “economically disadvantaged” students. Although standardized tests have long been used to identify students who qualify for educational assistance, the new law raises standardized testing to a higher pitch, requiring states to implement “accountability systems” covering all public schools and students. All students in grades 3 through 8 are to be tested by rigorous standards in reading and math. In addition, states are to establish and meet “progress objectives” ensuring that *all* groups of students reach academic proficiency within 12 years. To monitor the progress of “all groups,” “test results are to be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency” (U.S. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002, p. 1).

Schools that meet or exceed their progress objectives will be eligible for an “achievement award,” whereas those who fall below must improve or be subject to “corrective action,” such as restaffing. The NCLB act thus places tremendous pressures on schools serving groups who tend to score lower on standardized tests than their middle- and upper-class, White counterparts.

Over the decades *socioeconomic status* has proven to be one of the strongest predictors of standardized test performance. Children from low-income families consistently score lower than those in more affluent circumstances, and racial, ethnic, and language minority students are overrepresented in the lower income brackets. Unfortunately, it is not clear that mandating achievement will improve learning or even raise test scores, especially with the high pressure atmosphere it creates. For example, we have heard young children anxiously voice concern that their test performance might cause their favorite teacher to be moved to another school.

Equally problematic is the danger that test scores may be used inappropriately either to retain students or to sort them into less challenging instructional programs. Even worse, high-stakes testing may actually increase the already high dropout rate among racial, ethnic, and language minority students. Because of the lifelong consequences of educational decisions based on high-stakes testing, it is essential that these tests be proven both fair and valid for all students, especially those living in poverty. Therefore, constant scrutiny is needed to monitor the effects of high-stakes testing to ensure that all students are provided meaningful and equitable access to a high quality education, one that welcomes them in rather than pushing them out and one that broadens their life choices rather than narrowing them (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Ruteledge, 2003; Valdez Pierce, 2003).

In addition to issues related to socioeconomic status, testing and progress mandates such as those in NCLB pose special problems for many students new to English. First of all, *English proficiency* affects student performance and may render test results inaccurate if not totally invalid (Abedi, 2001; Abedi, Leon, & Mirocha, 2001). If performance is low, it may not be clear whether the cause is limited English knowledge, insufficient content knowledge, or a combination of both. In addition to English language proficiency, other factors may affect English learners’ preparedness for successful performance, including the amount, quality, content, and continuity of prior schooling relative to the content and format of the test (TESOL, 2003).

Furthermore, the NCLB actually requires an *accelerated learning pace* for English learners to close the achievement gap between them and the general student population. With research showing that it takes 5 to 10 years to develop academic language proficiency (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002), this progress mandate is ill informed and highly unrealistic for many English learners. Finally, it is important to remember that English proficiency is necessary but not sufficient for academic achievement in an English language curriculum. It takes more than knowledge of the language to make progress in school. Quality instruction, a safe and supportive school environment, student motivation, and parental support are also factors that come into play.

In summary, in recent decades we have witnessed a tidal wave of movement calling for high educational standards and assessment. In the past, curriculum content has been generally similar in schools across the country, but states and local communities have always retained control over the specifics. However the national standards and assessment movement is leading toward a standardized, uniform national curriculum. Whether these reforms will finally help or hinder learning

among *all* students remains to be seen. More problematic is the implementation of high-stakes testing, the effects of which have the potential to create larger divisions between rich and poor and between those with power and those without.

Education Policy Specific to English Learners

Although English learners are affected by general education policy, they are also subject to policies specific to their English proficiency status. Federal law requires schools to identify and serve students in need of educational support based on English language proficiency. The purpose of such educational support is twofold: (1) to promote English language development and (2) to provide meaningful instruction so that students may learn academic content appropriate to their grade level. Schools are free to choose the kind of program that will best meet the needs of their students, including whether students' primary language will be used for instruction or not. Since 1968 when the ESEA Title VII Bilingual Education Act was passed, bilingual education programs have been developed throughout the country, using languages such as Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, French, and Portuguese. In addition, bilingual programs have served numerous American Indian languages such as Navajo, Cherokee, and Crow. However with the passage of NCLB, the bilingual education provisions of ESEA Title VII have *not* been reauthorized for the first time in history. The current reauthorization of the ESEA thus effectively eliminates federal support for (but does not prohibit) bilingual instructional programs.

Instead of supporting bilingual instruction, the comprehensive NCLB Act places heavy emphasis on English language proficiency, not only for students but also for teachers, who must be certified as proficient in written and oral English. Although leaving schools choice of program type, the act requires them to use instructional methods that research has proven effective. To increase accountability, the act requires states to establish standards and benchmarks for English language proficiency and academic content. Academic content standards are to be aligned with those established for the general K-12 student population.

The elimination of federal support for bilingual education represents the culmination of several decades of heated debate, not just among lawmakers and educators, but among the general public as well. Arguments against bilingual education have often centered on the effectiveness of bilingual instruction in teaching English, with no attention given to potential benefits of bilingualism or primary language use and maintenance. Proponents and opponents both cite research and statistics to support their cases regarding the effectiveness of bilingual instruction (cf. Crawford, 1999; Faltis & Hudelson, 1998; Lessow-Hurley, 2000; Ovando, 2003; Ovando, et al., 2003). However research seldom provides absolute, unequivocal findings. Instead, results have to be interpreted based on the research method, including background information on students and teachers in the study, the type of program implemented, the extent to which teachers follow the program model, and many other variables. Because it is difficult to control for these variables, research results are usually open to criticism on either side of the debate. In the final analysis, research findings tend to play a smaller role than attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideology in the effectiveness debate. We offer additional resources on bilingual education in Example 1.2.

EXAMPLE 1.2 • USEFUL RESOURCES ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION

- Brisk, M. E. (2005). *Bilingual education: From compensatory to quality schooling* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Crawford, J. (1999). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory and practice* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Faltis, C. J., & Hudelson, S. J. (1998). *Bilingual education in elementary and secondary school communities: Toward understanding and caring*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lessow-Hurley, J. (2005). *The foundations of dual language instruction* (4th ed.). New York: Addison-Wesley Longman.
- Ovando, C. (2003, Spring). Bilingual education in the United States: Historical development and current issues. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 27(1), 1–24.

In addition to the effectiveness issue, anti-bilingual-education sentiment is fueled by the belief that to unify diverse groups, English should be used exclusively in public settings. The use of languages other than English in hospitals, social service agencies, schools, voting booths, and other public venues is considered anathema by members of the “English-only” movement, promoted by groups such as U.S. English and English First. Resentment against immigrants and resources allocated to serve them adds fuel to the English-only movement. These sentiments have found their way into a variety of ballot initiatives in states, such as California and Arizona, aimed at (1) eliminating bilingual education, (2) restricting public services to immigrants, and (3) requiring English as the “official language” to the exclusion of all others. Whether such initiatives are upheld in the courts or not, they send a chilly message that finds its way into our classrooms as we attempt to create positive learning environments for English learners (Gutierrez, et al., 2002).

In summary, English learners are subject to both *general* education policy and to policy *specific* to their English learner status. Educational reform in the United States has become extremely politicized in recent decades. Now more than ever, state and federal legislators are mandating not only the content of the curriculum, but at times also the method of instruction. Greater and greater emphasis is being placed on English as the exclusive language of instruction. These trends are leading to greater uniformity and standardization in curriculum and instruction. The current emphasis on detailed and specific curriculum standards and concomitant high-stakes testing has placed tremendous pressure on students, teachers, and principals to get students to test well. These trends existed before the passage of NCLB and are likely to continue when the ESEA comes up again for reauthorization. Now as never before educators need to form a strong voice in the political processes that create education policy.

LA CUCARACHA

BY LALO ALCARAZ



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What Kinds of Programs Exist to Meet the Needs of English Learners?

If you are fairly new to the enterprise of educating English learners, you might be interested in the kinds of programs in place throughout the country to serve them. We offer such information in the following sections so that you will have an idea of what some school districts are doing. If your school has just begun to experience growth in English learner populations, these general descriptions may provide a starting point for considering a more formalized English language learner support program. It is important to reiterate that *federal law* requires that all English learners be provided with an educational program that provides them (1) *access to the core curriculum* and (2) *opportunities for English language development*. Districts are given substantial latitude in selecting program types and choosing whether to use the students' home language for instruction. *State laws govern program requirements at a more specific level*. Thus as you consider program development for your English learners, you will want to seek information from your state and local offices of education.

Bilingual Education Programs

English language learners find themselves in a wide variety of school programs, from those carefully tailored to meet their specific linguistic and cultural needs to programs in which little is done differently to accommodate them. Perhaps the simplest distinction among programs is whether two languages or one is used for instruction. Bilingual education programs are defined as educational programs that use two languages, one of which must be English, for teaching purposes. Bilingual education programs have taken many forms, but two goals are common to all: (1) to teach English and (2) to provide access to the core curriculum through the home language while students are gaining English language proficiency (Lesso-Hurley, 2005).

The following are brief sketches of some of the most prevalent bilingual program models. As you read these descriptions, think of them as skeletons that may vary considerably in the flesh as differences in communities, students, teachers, and administrators affect program implementation. In addition, bear in mind that some program models may overlap and that a single model may be called by a different name from the one given here.

In the program model descriptions we indicate whether the program serves language minority students, language majority students, or both. In the United States and other English-speaking countries, **language minority students** are those who speak a language other than English at home. In other words, their home language is a minority group language such as Cantonese, Crow, or Spanish. **Language majority students** are those whose primary language is English, the predominant national language or majority language. In this book, we are concerned with language minority students who are learning English in school, thus the term *English learners*. However a discussion of bilingual program models would be incomplete without some mention of the immersion model developed in Canada, in which language majority students learn a minority group language in school. The extensively researched Canadian immersion model, discussed subsequently, has been highly successful and has influenced instructional development in second language teaching throughout the world (Lessow-Hurley, 2005).

TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION. Transitional bilingual education programs are designed to serve language minority students who are limited English proficient. Primary language instruction is provided for one to three years. The purpose of primary language instruction is to build a foundation in literacy and academic content that will facilitate English language and academic development as students acquire the new language. After the transition to English instruction, no further instruction in the home language is offered. The goal is to develop English language proficiency for limited English proficient students as soon as possible.

MAINTENANCE BILINGUAL EDUCATION. Maintenance bilingual education is designed to serve language minority students who are limited English proficient. It differs from transitional bilingual education in that primary language instruction is provided *throughout* the elementary grades and in some cases continues in middle and high school. English language instruction is also provided throughout the grades. The purpose of the maintenance model is to help language minority students develop and maintain their primary language and become fully proficient in oral and written English. Thus the program goals include full bilingualism and biliteracy for English learners.

IMMERSION EDUCATION. Originally developed in Canada, immersion programs are designed to teach a minority language to language majority students. For example, in Canada, native English-speaking students often learn French as a second language. In the United States, native English-speaking students learn languages such as Spanish or Cantonese. In immersion programs, students receive subject matter instruction through their second language to develop second language proficiency while learning academic content. Special techniques are used to help them understand, participate, and learn in the new language. Language, content, and literacy

instruction take place in the students' new language in the early grades, with the gradual introduction of English language arts as students progress up the grades. The ultimate goal is full bilingualism and biliteracy in English and the minority language for native English-speaking students. Immersion programs are therefore *bilingual* programs designed to serve language majority students. Canadian immersion programs have been extensively studied and evaluated by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Genesee, 1984, 1987; Swain & Lapkin, 1989). The success of the Canadian immersion model has influenced program development in two-way immersion described in the next section and structured English immersion and sheltered instruction (cf. Krashen, 1984) discussed in a subsequent section.

TWO-WAY IMMERSION PROGRAMS. Two-way immersion programs, also called developmental bilingual education (Christian, 1994), combine elements of Canadian immersion and maintenance bilingual education to serve *both* language majority and language minority students. Two-way immersion programs group more or less equal numbers of native English-speaking students and native speakers of a minority language together for instruction. In the early grades the non-English language (e.g., Spanish) is used for instruction in an immersion approach, that is, second language acquisition through content instruction in the second language. This procedure provides second language development for English speakers and intensive primary language development for the native speakers of the minority language early on. Instruction through English, including reading and writing, begins with about 20 minutes a day in kindergarten and is gradually increased as students move up the grades until approximately equal time is given for each language (Reynolds, Dale, & Moore, 1989). As English language instruction increases, native English speakers develop their primary language (English) skills, and native Spanish speakers develop their second language (English) skills. At the same time, both groups develop skills in the minority language. Alternatively, some two-way programs use both languages from kindergarten on up the grades in approximately equal proportions. In any case, the goal is full bilingualism and biliteracy for *both* language minority and language majority students. For example, the English speakers acquire Spanish or Cantonese and the Spanish or Cantonese speakers acquire English. Both groups develop and maintain their home languages. Emphasis on primary language maintenance for language minority students is a goal shared by the maintenance bilingual education model. The two-way program model has been carefully developed, researched, and evaluated in school districts throughout the United States with positive results (cf. Christian, 1994; Lindholm, 1990; Lindholm & Gavlek, 1994; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Peregoy, 1991; Peregoy & Boyle, 1990a).

NEWCOMER PROGRAMS. Newcomer programs are designed to support the initial adjustment of immigrant students to the language, culture, and schooling of their new country. All students in newcomer programs are recent arrivals from other countries. Newcomer programs emphasize the integration of academic and personal-social support to help students adjust (Chang, 1990). Newcomer programs may make use of students' home languages for instruction, but they also emphasize systematic English language instruction. Newcomer programs are short term, often only one year, and are intended to prepare students to succeed in regular schooling situations, where they may continue to receive bilingual instruction, English language development, and sheltered English content

instruction, also referred to as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). (Full discussion of SDAIE is provided in Chapter 3.)

English Language Instructional Programs

Bilingual education programs serve only a small percentage of eligible students. Much more common are instructional programs that make use of only one language, English, for teaching. In many urban and suburban areas today, classrooms include students from several language groups, making bilingual instruction difficult to implement. Program types that use only English for instruction include the following:

SHELTERED ENGLISH OR SPECIALLY DESIGNED ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH (SDAIE). In these programs, students are taught subject matter entirely in English. Subject matter instruction is organized to promote second language acquisition while teaching cognitively demanding, grade level appropriate material. Special teaching techniques are used to help students understand English instruction even though they are still limited in English language proficiency. Sheltered instruction, or SDAIE, is most effective for students who have already achieved intermediate English language proficiency. Primary language support may be provided separately according to district resources and student needs.

ESL PULLOUT. In these programs, English learners receive the majority of their instruction in regular classrooms alongside their monolingual English-speaking peers. However, they are pulled out of the classroom on a regular basis to receive additional help from an ESL teacher or aide. The help they receive consists of English language development activities and reinforcement of subject matter being taught in the regular classroom. The goal is to help students get by while becoming proficient in oral and written English.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT. In these programs, English learners are taught all subject matter using English as the language of instruction in a class taught by a teacher with special knowledge of second language development. The majority of students in such classes are usually non-native English speakers with various levels of English language proficiency. At the elementary school level, English language development teachers are responsible for teaching students English language and literacy skills and the full elementary school core curriculum, including mathematics, science, and social studies. The goal is full English language, literacy, and academic development. At the secondary level, English language development teachers are primarily responsible for English language and literacy development; content is taught by subject matter specialists using sheltering or SDAIE techniques. The term *English Language Development* is sometimes used synonymously with ESL and ESOL.

STRUCTURED ENGLISH IMMERSION. In these programs English learners are taught all content through English using sheltering techniques to make instruction understandable. It is important to distinguish structured English immersion from the Canadian immersion model described previously. Specifically, structured English immersion does not promote primary language literacy, whereas the Canadian

model does. Therefore, the goal of structured English immersion is language, literacy, and content learning in English only, whereas the Canadian model aims for full bilingualism and biliteracy. Some states have passed laws through ballot initiatives limiting language assistance through structured English immersion to one year only. This time limit flies in the face of research showing that ELs need *at least* five to seven years to acquire sufficient English for academic participation in general education classes (Cummins, 1979; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

English Learners in the “General Education” Classroom

Although various bilingual and monolingual English support programs have been designed specifically for English learners, many students find themselves in classrooms where little, if any, special assistance is provided. These students face a sink-or-swim situation. Increasingly, however, sound practices in second language teaching are reaching the general education or “regular” classroom teacher. In this book, we offer information and ideas for developing language and literacy skills in English as a non-native language. We believe that these ideas can be applied by teachers, regardless of the type of program: bilingual, ELD, or English only. Just as our students bring diverse backgrounds, so also will programs exhibit diversity as we all join forces to move our students toward educational success and integration into the larger society.

Quality Indicators to Look for in Programs Serving English Learners

We have seen that English learner programs vary widely. However there are certain basic elements recognized by professionals in English learner education that any quality program should include. These elements are summarized in the following statement on the education of K-12 language minority students in the United States issued by TESOL, the international, professional organization for educators working with English learners (TESOL, 1992).

TESOL supports programs which promote students’ growth in English language proficiency, enhance cognitive growth, facilitate academic achievement, and encourage cultural and social adjustment. Such programs include:

- comprehensive English as a Second Language instruction for linguistically diverse students which prepares them to handle content area material in English.
- instruction in the content areas which is academically challenging but also is tailored to the linguistic proficiency, educational background, and academic needs of students.
- opportunities for students to further develop and/or use their first language in order to promote academic and social development.
- professional development opportunities for both ESOL and other classroom teachers which prepare them to facilitate the language and academic growth of linguistically and culturally different children.*

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Using Research and Expert Views to Inform Practice

Over the past decade or so, education policy makers have called for systematic reviews of research and expert opinion to identify best practices in the field of English learner education. One such effort funded by the U.S. Office of Education addresses “effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades” (Gersten et al., 2007). The complete report is available from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee>. We summarize the report’s five major recommendations for you here. *First*, **formative assessments** of English learners’ reading should be carried out to identify students who may need extra help learning to read. *Second*, **small group interventions** are then recommended to provide focused instruction in areas of assessed need. *Third*, **vocabulary instruction** is highlighted. Essential content words should be taught in depth along with instruction on common words, phrases, and expressions not yet learned. *Fourth*, **academic English** instruction should be provided to develop students’ ability to use English for academic discourse, reading and writing text, and formal argument. *Fifth*, **peer-assisted learning** opportunities should be provided frequently. In particular, students should work in pairs to complete structured, academic tasks. Paired students should represent different levels of ability or English language development. As you read through the book you now hold in your hands, you will discover *our* effort to connect theory, research, and best practices in English learner education. In this process, we include discussions of the topics highlighted in the report previously mentioned.



Summary

In this chapter, we have highlighted the rich diversity among students who are learning English as a second language in school. In our descriptions, we focus on children’s different experiential backgrounds and strengths, while pointing out particular challenges they face in school. Because we believe strongly in building on each student’s prior knowledge and experience, we suggest a variety of ways you can get to know your English learners, even though you may not yet share a common language. These activities include personal writing topics, interactive journal writing, and writing by students in their home language. Knowing that cultural differences can create an initial source of miscommunication, we have pointed out various components of culture defined by anthropologists, while suggesting ways to recognize and honor cultural differences among students in the classroom. We have also discussed how classroom organization and language use may be more or less comfortable for students as a result of both cultural and individual differences. We suggest cooperative group learning as one strategy for integrating students into the classroom fabric and promoting English language acquisition. Because we are convinced that social and emotional security form an essential base for learning, we have also provided a variety of ways to promote newcomers’ sense of belonging from day one, using Maslow’s hierarchy to give attention to their social–emotional needs. Finally, we offered an overview of the kinds of classrooms and programs in which English language learners find them-

selves. In the next chapter, we will present the details of second language acquisition, maintaining our emphasis on students' experiences and reactions to the processes and motivating factors that lead to learning their new language, English.

As we come to the conclusion of this chapter, an experience comes to mind that happened 30 years ago during the summer after my (Suzanne's) first year teaching second grade in a Spanish/English bilingual maintenance program in Guadalupe, California. I had gone to my mother's home reservation, the Flathead Indian Nation in northwestern Montana, to visit relatives and enjoy the summer celebrations. From there we proceeded to the Crow Fair in southeastern Montana, where people gathered from all over the United States and Canada for singing, dancing, stick games, fry bread, beadwork and turquoise jewelry, and festivities at what is billed as the "biggest tipi encampment in the world." You meet a lot of new people at Crow Fair. One afternoon while relaxing in the shade with my relatives near the Little Bighorn River, we met a family from Canada: mom, dad, and three teenagers. The father, a lanky, long-haired man in his late 40s, asked me what my work was. I replied that I was a bilingual teacher in California and that my second-graders were mostly immigrants from Mexico. I was proud of my work. He paused reflectively and then asked, "Why aren't you helping your own people?" These words stunned me. My words stuck in my throat and would not form themselves into a meaningful reply. Into the silence, my grandmother intervened, "They are *all* her children."

In today's world, these words take on even greater meaning, as the diversity among our students increases daily. Few teachers will go through their careers without encountering students different from themselves in language, culture, race, religion, social class, or land of birth. For teachers of English learners, such differences are a given, representing the challenge and reward inherent in our professional lives. Facilitating English learners to speak, read, write, and learn in a new language has become the task of an increasing number of teachers each day. Without a doubt, it is a task that calls for new learning, not only about theories of language and learning, but also about other people, other cultures, and about ourselves.

The essence of our message throughout this book calls for creating a welcoming classroom climate, one that provides each student with a variety of ways to be an active participant and successful contributor. We do not downplay the challenge of creating classroom unity out of student diversity, but we believe strongly that it can be done. Teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students presents an exciting learning opportunity for all of us. Is it easy? Certainly not! The opportunity for any learning and growth, our own and that of our students, is accompanied by great challenge and risk. Successful teaching with culturally diverse students calls for a willingness to go the extra mile, to observe ourselves critically, to question our assumptions, and perhaps to try doing things a little differently: teachers continually learning with open eyes, open minds, and open hearts!

In recalling his younger years, novelist John Steinbeck spoke of just such a teacher:

In her classroom our speculations ranged the world. She breathed curiosity into us so that each day we came with new questions, new ideas, cupped and shielded in our hands like captured fireflies. When she left us, we were sad; but the light did not go out. She had written her indelible signature on our minds. I have had lots of teachers who taught me soon forgotten things; but only a few who created in me a new energy, a new direction. I suppose I am the unwritten manuscript of such a person. What deathless power lies in the hands of such a teacher.

May you be such a teacher!! (CTA Journal, November, 1955)

Suggestions for Further Reading

Becker, H. (2001). *Teaching ESL K–12: Views from the classroom with commentary from Else Hamayan*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

This is a good introductory book for teachers and administrators alike. It discusses topics including ESL curriculum, program models for secondary and elementary schools, assessment issues, special education, and parent involvement. The discussion with commentary offers a unique look at ESL programs. From the back cover of the text: “Teaching ESL K–12 shows the kind of meaningful professional conversation that teachers can have as they relate their ‘wisdom of practice’ to the social discourse of research and policy-making.”

Cadiero-Kaplan, K. (2004). *The literacy curriculum & bilingual education*. New York: Peter Lang. Cadiero-Kaplan’s excellent book discusses issues of policy, ideology, and politics in terms of how they influence literacy instruction.

Chapters include: Schooled Literacy Ideologies, Public Policy: Literacy & Bilingual Education, Engaging Factors of Hegemony & Historicity of Knowledge, Engaging Literacy Ideology & Pedagogy, and Institutional Practices & Effects of Literacy Ideologies, and Creating Knowledge through Praxis. The book is an excellent guide for teachers who want to make a difference in our educational system.

Christensen, L. (2000). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools. The author sees the teaching of reading and writing as ultimately political acts. The book looks at teaching for social justice and contains lots of samples of student writing. Chapters topics include: Building Community Out of Chaos, Unlearning the Myths that Bind Us, Writing the Word and the World, The Politics of Language, Poetry, Immigration, Portfolios, and Untracking English. Ultimately the book aims at “creating quality education for all students.”

Díaz-Rico, L. T., & Weed, K. Z. (2006). *The cross-cultural, language and academic development handbook: A complete K–12 reference guide* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This 334-page book outlines all the basic information considered essential for the California English learner credential. Chapters cover information on second language acquisition and teaching; assessment; culture and cultures in contact; program models; and language program policies and issues. This resource is both comprehensive and up to date in its presentation of theory, research, and practice.

Garcia, G. (Ed.). (2003). *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English Literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

This edited text contains articles from top teachers and researchers in second language literacy. There are three sections: Teaching English Learners to Read: Current Policy and Best Instructional Practice; Teaching English Language Development: Rethinking and Redesigning Curriculum; and Optimizing Culture as a Bridge to Literacy Learning. This is an excellent, informative collection of articles.

Hall, J. K. & Eggington, W. G. (Ed.). (2000). *The sociopolitics of English language learning*. New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd. This edited book focuses on the political, cultural, and social dimensions of English language teaching. It has three major sections: Language Politics, Language Practices, and English Teaching; The Social, Cultural, and Political Dimensions of Language Education; and Possibilities for Action. Some sample articles by top people in the field are: “Linguistic Human Rights and Teachers of English” by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas; “The Social Politics and Cultural Politics of Language Classrooms” by Alastair Pennycook; and “Disciplinary Knowledge as a Foundation for Teachers Preparation” by William Grabe, Fredricka Stoller, and Christine Tardy. This is an excellent place to start if you are interested in going beyond the basic areas of language teaching and methodology.

Hinkel, E. (Ed.). (2005). *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. This excellent, informative book contains 57 different articles on second language literacy and learning under eight different major headings: Important Social Contexts in Research on Second Language

Teaching and Learning, Methods in Second Language Research, Applied Linguistics and Second Language Research, Second Language Processes and Development, Methods and Curricula in Second Language Teaching, Second Language Testing and Assessment, Identity, Culture, and Critical Pedagogy in Second Language Teaching and Learning, and Language Planning and Policy and Language Rights. We recommend this book to every teacher.

Meyer, L. (Ed.). (2000a). *Theory into practice*, 39 (4). Columbus, Ohio State University.

This themed volume brings together an exciting array of articles that portray issues and insights related to the diversity of children and languages in U.S. schools. Articles address immigrants learning English and “learning America,” loss of family languages, American Indian languages and tribal sovereignty, barriers to meaningful instruction for English learners, and English learners learning to read English. In addition there is an eye-opening

dialogue among four bilingual, African-ancestry teachers, and finally an article on two-way immersion in the United States. Lily Wong Fillmore’s article on the loss of family languages has won a national award.

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This short book (132 pages) presents differentiated instruction (DI) in theory and practice. Chapters include: What is DA, elements of differentiation, ethinking how we do school—and for whom, learning environments that support DA, good instruction as a basis for differentiated teaching, teachers at work building differentiated classrooms, instructional strategies that support differentiation, and how do teachers make it all work. This book, with classroom examples, is all you need to get started with a truly differentiated approach to instruction.



Activities

1. As you look at Table 1.1, try to answer as many of the questions as you can regarding your own family traditions. For example, when you think of family, are you thinking about your mother and father and perhaps a sister or brother or are you thinking of hundreds of cousins, uncles, and aunts who get together every year for the holidays? Compare your answers with those of another adult. What are the similarities and differences?
2. Take the opportunity to visit a school near you that enrolls newly arrived students from other countries. Obtain permission from the principal to visit one of the classrooms. As you observe, try to find out where the students are from and what kinds of special help they are receiving. Use a checklist containing questions such as: What language(s) do the students speak? What assistance are they receiving? Is there a paraprofessional who speaks the students’ language(s) or does the teacher use the language? Are there special materials available in the students’ home language? What kind of program would you design for these students to promote language development and content-area learning if you were the teacher?
3. Meet with a teacher who specializes in teaching English as a second language. Ask his or her views about the effects of students’ cultural and prior educational backgrounds on their school performance. What accommodations does the teacher make to help students adjust? What kinds of programs does the teacher consider best for English learners and why? What kinds of materials or activities has the teacher used with success with English learners?
4. Talk with a child who is learning English as a non-native language. Ask what it is like to learn English in school; what the hardest part is; what has been fun, if anything; and how long it has taken so far. Ask the student to tell you what program, materials, and activities seem to work best for her or him.

5. Begin an informal study of an ethnic group that you would like to know more about. Begin charting information about the group by listing and noting specific information from Table 1.1, such as the family structures, life cycles, roles of men

and women in the culture, discipline structures, religion, values, and the like. In addition, after you've gathered descriptive information, look for literature to read by members of that group to get a sense of the culture from an inside view.



Video Homework Exercise

The Importance of Culture

In the video teachers and other English learner education experts discuss the role of culture in the process of second language acquisition, especially as it plays out in classroom interactions among students and teachers. Various aspects of culture are highlighted, including what people do, think, and believe about what constitutes appropriate ways to interact in the classroom; cultural norms concerning the meaning of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions; and how much distance to maintain from others during conversations. The importance of learning about and validating students' home cultures is emphasized.

Go to MyEducationLab, select the topic "Diversity," and watch the video entitled "The Importance of Culture."

1. Compare the aspects of culture presented in the video with the information in the Chapter 1 section, "How Do Cultural Differences Affect Teaching and Learning?" Develop your own definition of culture, providing three examples of how it applies to classroom interactions and student learning.
2. The video emphasizes learning about and validating students' home cultures. Describe several ways you can learn about students' home cultures. You may wish to refer to the Chapter 1 section "Classroom Activities That Let You Get to Know Your Students."
3. In the video, mention is made of the friction and emotional stress that may occur when cultural norms are violated. Examine Table 1.1, and identify one specific cultural aspect that might be a source of friction or stress as a result of differences between home and school norms. How might you resolve the issue, while at the same time respecting the home culture?